

June 4, 2008

## Graduation signals empowerment for families

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Alesia and Robert Brown's graduation is the start toward building a bright future for their grandson and themselves.

"Before, I only knew how I was raised and that might not have been the best way," Robert Brown said. "When I was young, your parents only talked to the teacher when you were in trouble."

Tuesday evening, the Browns and their grandson, Anthony Carter, a first-grader at Miller Elementary, were among six families wearing handmade mortarboards as they walked into the Miller cafeteria to celebrate their completion of the Lafayette's first Families and Schools Together (FAST) program.

FAST is a partnership between Trinity United Methodist Church, Lafayette School Corp., and Lafayette's Weed & Seed Initiative.

During eight weeks, its goal is to empower parents and show them how to empower and prepare their children for success.

"It is nice to know that we aren't the only ones going through situations with a child," Alesia Brown said. "We learned a lot and we made friends with the other parents."

Families with one child at Miller were eligible for the classes, which focused on learning ways to communicate, listen, share, express emotions and how to play, said Elizabeth Lana, FAST coordinator.

Each week, families ate a meal together and worked with a team of trained FAST volunteers.

The classes helped Estefania Contreras, a Sunnyside Middle School seventh-grader, her younger sisters and their mother understand each other better.

"It gave us time to talk with each other," she said.

Speaking in Spanish, Nelsi Contreras, Estefania's mother, said patience and listening more were major benefits of the class.

FAST's focus on education, and support of other parents, gave Alesia Brown the needed push to work towards completing her GED.

The FAST program will expand in the fall, Lana.

Two cycles of FAST classes are scheduled for Miller families and programs are expected in 2009 at Murdock Elementary and Miami Elementary schools. Ten families can take part in each cycle.